



## [The Brave New Digital World: An interview with K.C. Blake](#)

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Welcome to another State of the eBook! This week we're bringing in an expert to share some thoughts on eBooks, music and movies, and where the future is taking digital media. Read on for Gear Diary's interview with K.C. Blake of the [Entertainment Technology Center at University of Southern California](#).

ETC is an organization within USC that exists to study consumers and digital media. From their [website](#):

The ETC brings together senior executives from the entertainment, consumer electronics, technology, and services industries to discuss and importantly, to act upon, topics related to the creation, distribution, and consumption of entertainment content.

The ETC, an organization within the USC School of Cinematic Arts, helps drive collaborative projects among our member companies, and also brings next generation consumers to the table to understand the impact of new technology on all aspects of the entertainment industry – technology [development](#) and implementation, the creative process, and existing business models.

[K.C. Blake](#) is the director of business development at ETC, as well as the head of the anywhere/anytime laboratory, where they study potential trends in consumer technology. His previous background includes work in content development and film production. Essentially, he's the perfect person to ask about digital media and its impact on the consumer world.

My first question was the one everyone seems to ask in some form or another: Is there such a thing as a "Kindle Killer"? K.C. was quick to deny there is such a thing. He explained that in his view, there are multiple avenues, like the Sony Reader, the Kindle and the nook, and while the

nook has some features over the kindle, people are happy with their Kindles. What really makes a product a success is access to content, packaging that content in a simple interface, and providing a depth of library. Whether it is an unpaid service like Hulu, or a paid store like Amazon/iTunes/Barnes and Noble, the ease of finding content is what makes something successful.

This led to a discussion of Sony and where their reader line was going. K.C. noted that [hardware](#) hasn't been a big moneymaker for companies in a while, that the services are what sells, and that's where Sony fails. (Hmm...content is king...where have we [said this before?](#))

And of course, the subject of the 300lb gorilla in the room, [Apple](#), came up as well. He was less than bullish on an Apple tablet, explaining that Apple's hold on the movie world is much more tenuous than their music industry ties. He went on to say:

Apple controls the music industry, but does not control the video markets. Apple tv is lackluster, the whole model of people paying for tv is different; people are used to tv content for free. Apple will probably release a popular tablet but not a category killer.

K.C. also had one of the most reasonable, clear headed statements I've ever heard about paper books vs. eBooks:

Of course people will still read books, just like they listen to radio. Having a physical book will always be popular.

Finally, we discussed a few of the areas that send publishers to go hug their printing presses; piracy and margin shrinking. K.C. commented that trends indicate that as people get older, they tend to spend more and pirate less. Combined with the general trend of readers in general (and ebook readers in particular) to skew older, and that points to less likelihood of piracy in the ebook world. Someone should mention that to the publishers, who clearly don't agree (see exhibit a: crippling sharing on the nook!).

As far as margins go, K.C. pointed out it is inevitable that margins will shrink. However, the companies and industries that respond more quickly to the digital changes will succeed; the struggles of the music industry are a real life example of where inflexibility can be detrimental.

After we discussed ebooks, the conversation turned to more general trends in technology. K.C. very enthusiastically shared his views about the future of television. TVs are more connected than ever, with widgets and access to downloadable content from Hulu, netflix, etc. One of the next big shakeups may be people questioning their cable bills when they have so much on-demand content at their fingertips!

K.C. shared some fantastic insights into the new world of media, and he hit upon many themes we're already starting to see in new tech. Content is king, and internet connectivity through wifi and cellular connections is becoming mandatory, rather than a bonus feature. It will be interesting to see what companies and industries survive and thrive in this new digital world.

I want to thank K.C. Blake and ETC@USC for the opportunity to interview him!